

Vulnerable Palestine refugees affected by ongoing clashes in southern Syria

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Damascus

Since 29 July heavy shelling and clashes in the Dera'a Governorate in Southern Syria have caused loss of life, injury and the displacement of many hundreds of vulnerable families, including Palestine refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

UNRWA is extremely concerned for the lives and wellbeing of some 30,000 Palestine refugees registered with the Agency in south Syria. Around one third of them used to reside in the Dera'a camp for Palestine refugees before the conflict, which suffered large-scale destruction as a result of the hostilities. Recently, a small number of Palestine refugees have returned to the camp despite the limited availability of services offered to them, primarily because of lack of alternatives. More than 600 Palestine refugee families (3,000 individuals) reside in the camp area as of 2021.

The recent clashes in and around Dera'a have caused the displacement of more than half the families who live inside the camp. The humanitarian conditions of families that remain inside the camp are dire with reports that most of the medications and food stocks, including bread are now depleted since the main humanitarian crossing Saraya was closed on 12 August to vehicles and pedestrians. Water and electricity are also reportedly completely cut off inside the camp.

Increased clashes in western Dera'a are also affecting Palestine refugees who live there and limit their access to UNRWA services, especially with the closure of the UNRWA health clinic in Muzeirib since 1 August. Humanitarian needs are immense, including the demand for emergency food and non-food items, and people living near the clashes face increased risks related to contamination by explosive remnants of war. Displaced families have often moved in with relatives, this adding to their burden and increasing the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19. Most families are struggling to pay rent or reside in homes that have been damaged or partially destroyed by hostilities over the last decade.

The clashes have severely impacted the ability of Palestine refugees to move out of Dera'a camp and have limited their access to UNRWA services usually available in Dera'a city, including UNRWA cash and food assistance, health services, relief and social services and protection. Several other UNRWA donor funded projects in the camp, designed to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, are also affected. The current situation has

delayed the work needed to prepare for a return of children to UNRWA schools, whose opening also risks being delayed. It also raises increased safety concerns for the safety of UNRWA staff working in Dera'a Governorate.

In a decade-long conflict, most Palestine refugees have been displaced multiple times. The latest hostilities and shelling in and around Dera'a have dramatically reduced the ability of UNRWA to continue providing critical services to a very vulnerable community. Parties to the conflict must ensure unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance into the area, including access to UNRWA services. The Saraya crossing point, which allows the passage of people and goods, and that has been closed since 30 July must remain open to allow Palestine refugees' access to basic services. All parties must protect civilians and safeguard civilian infrastructure, including UNRWA installations in Dera'a Governorate.

Background Information:

UNRWA is confronted with an increased demand for services resulting from a growth in the number of registered Palestine refugees, the extent of their vulnerability and their deepening poverty. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions and financial support has been outpaced by the growth in needs. As a result, the UNRWA programme budget, which supports the delivery of core essential services, operates with a large shortfall. UNRWA encourages all Member States to work collectively to exert all possible efforts to fully fund the Agency's programme budget. UNRWA emergency programmes and key projects, also operating with large shortfalls, are funded through separate funding portals. UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 and mandated to provide assistance and protection to some 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA across its five fields of operation. Its mission is to help Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip achieve their full human development potential, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. UNRWA services encompass education, health care, relief and social services, camp infrastructure and improvement, protection and microfinance.